



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

# THE TIOGA ROAD ACROSS THE SIERRA NEVADA

By CHARLES J. BELDEN

The remarkable system of wide, well-graded Alpine highways of Europe and particularly those of Switzerland and Italy, afford ample suggestion

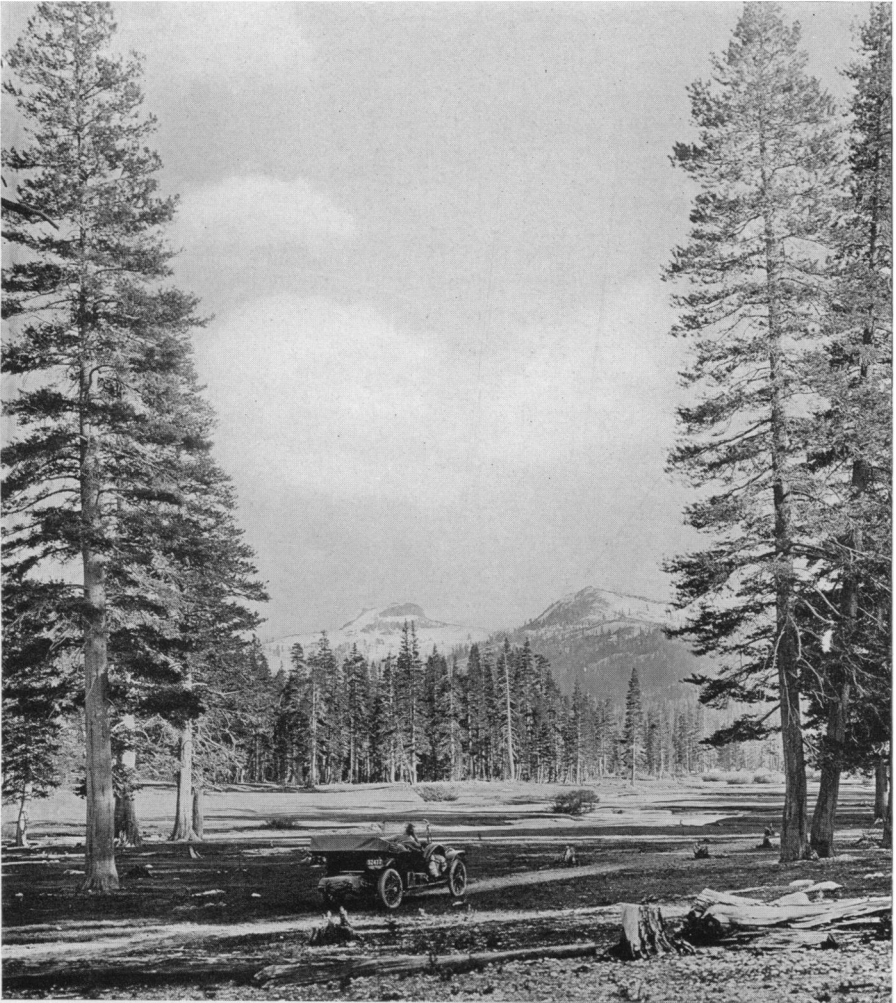


FIG. 1—On the Tioga Road: An alpine meadow nestling close under snow-capped peaks. (All photos by the author.)

that we also should pay attention to the conservation and utilization of natural scenic attractions along our own mountain roads. Threading back

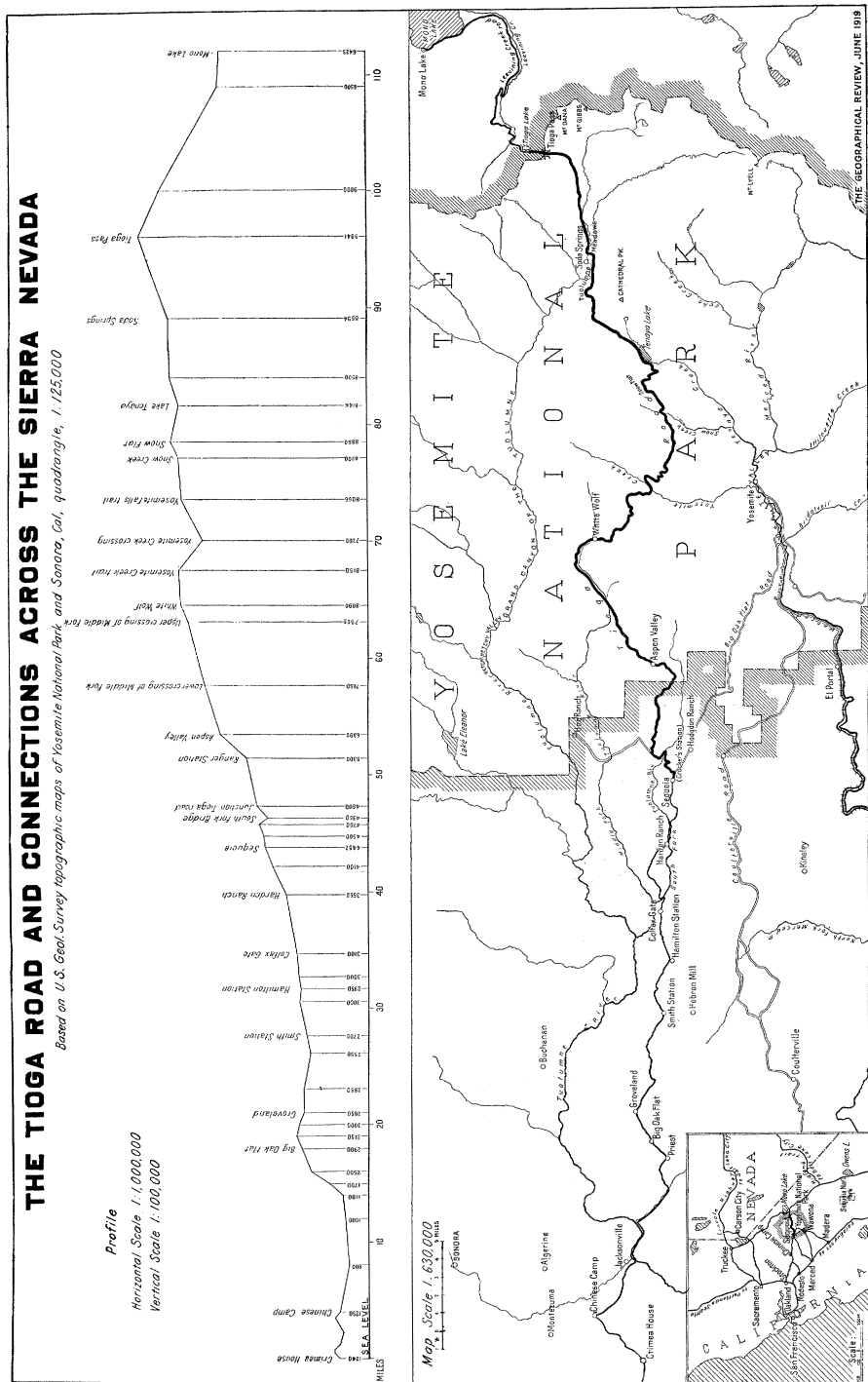


Fig. 2—Map (scale, 1:630,000) and profile (horizontal, 1:1,000,000; vertical, 1:100,000) of the Tioga Road and connections across the Sierra Nevada. (On the profile, at Mile 66, insert Yosemite Creek divide, elevation 8,550 feet.)

and forth across the snow-capped Alps, these substantially built roads have given enjoyment to countless millions of travelers from all parts of the globe. In time of war these same roads have been of inestimable value in transferring armies and supplies quickly and efficiently and have proved their value many times over.

### THE TIOGA ROAD

In our own country the roads that penetrate regions of scenic grandeur are not widely known and are not sought after as travelers seek the St. Gotthard or the Stelvio roads, often journeying thousands of miles for the privilege of traversing these and other equally famous mountain routes. Crossing the Sierra Nevada Mountains just to the north of Yosemite Valley is a road recently opened to the public for general travel that bids fair to attain some day a world-wide reputation. The Tioga Road, as it is called, penetrates the most superb of the scenic grandeurs of the Sierras and offers to the gaze of the wayfarer an array of rugged granite peaks that would satisfy the most *blasé* alpinist.<sup>1</sup>

### ITS CONSTRUCTION AND HISTORY

The Tioga Road was constructed in 1882 by the Great Sierra Silver Mining Company for the purpose of transporting supplies to their mine in the very summit of the Sierras, and it has had a rather romantic and variegated history. The name "Tioga" was taken from Tioga County in New York, the home of the man who located the mine. The road was skillfully laid out, the construction being of a character unusually permanent for mountain roads in California. The bridges were all put in with fine stone abutments, and retaining walls were built wherever there was the least necessity for them. The surfacing of the road was exceedingly good, and altogether the original builders spared no expense to make this a model mountain thoroughfare. Chinese labor was used to a large extent, and the entire cost was very close to \$61,000, or approximately \$1,000 a mile.

The road had barely reached completion when the mine proved to be a losing venture and was abandoned. Almost \$1,000,000 was spent in this undertaking, which only added another chapter to the history of the many financial tragedies of Western mining.

---

<sup>1</sup> References to the Tioga Road will be found in the following official publications:

General Information Regarding Yosemite National Park: Season of 1918. 47 pp.; with automobile map of the park, 1:375,000, and tables of distances. National Park Service, U. S. Dept. of the Interior, Washington, D. C., 1918. Reference on p. 8.

[Second Annual] Report of the Director of the National Park Service for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1918. 284 pp. U. S. Dept. of the Interior, Washington, D. C., 1918. Reference on pp. 47-48.

R. S. Yard: The National Parks Portfolio. 11 Sections of views. National Park Service, U. S. Dept. of the Interior, Washington, D. C., 2nd edition, 1917. Reference in Section on Yosemite, pp. 16-17.

As to maps see—

Topographic Map of Yosemite National Park. 1:125,000. Contour interval, 100 ft. U. S. Geol. Survey, Washington, D. C., 1915.

Panoramic View of Yosemite National Park. 1:190,000. U. S. Dept. of the Interior, Washington, D. C. [Map in realistic coloring.]—EDIT. NOTE.

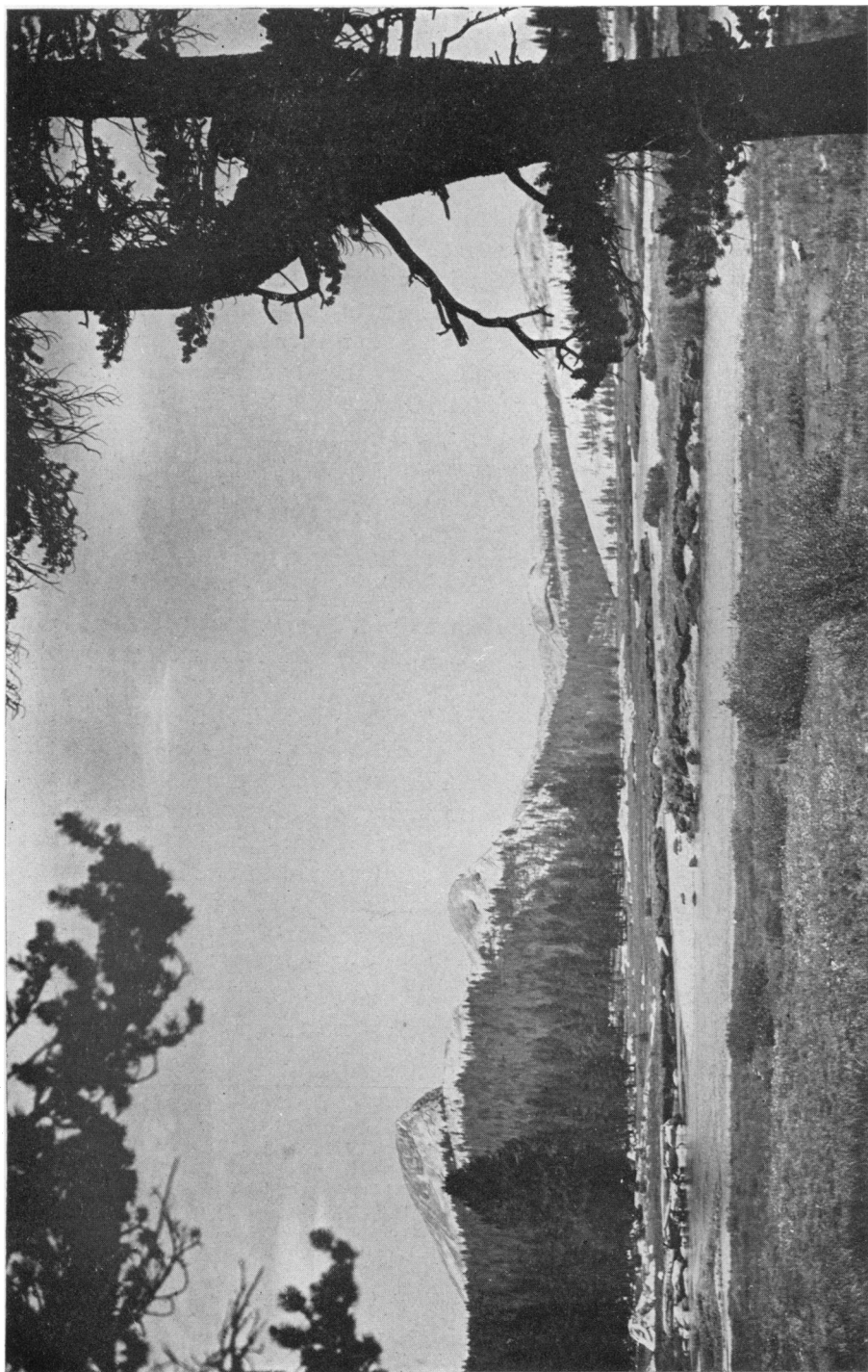


FIG. 3—The flowery expanse of Tuolumne Meadows.



FIG. 4—View from the summit of Tioga Pass, 9,941 feet in elevation.

The road remained in a state of neglect for a great many years and was practically impassable for any kind of vehicle. As it was private property the Government could not improve it, and the owners were not disposed to maintain it although they professed to do a certain amount



FIG. 5—Freight team on the Tioga Road. The road was originally built for twelve- and sixteen-horse freight teams.

of work each year. The heirs of the property offered it to the National Government and to the State of California at a constantly reduced figure as the years went by, and from time to time various Secretaries of the Interior recommended its purchase, but nothing definite resulted. Several bills were also introduced into Congress providing for the purchase of the road, but they never became law.

#### ITS ACQUISITION BY THE GOVERNMENT

The importance of the Tioga Road had been recognized for some time, not only as a means of establishing a new route across the mountains and



opening up the northern part of the Yosemite region but also as a connecting link of unsurpassed scenic quality for transcontinental automobile travel. In 1915 the road was finally acquired by a group of patriotic citizens, headed by Stephen T. Mather of Chicago, and deeded over to the

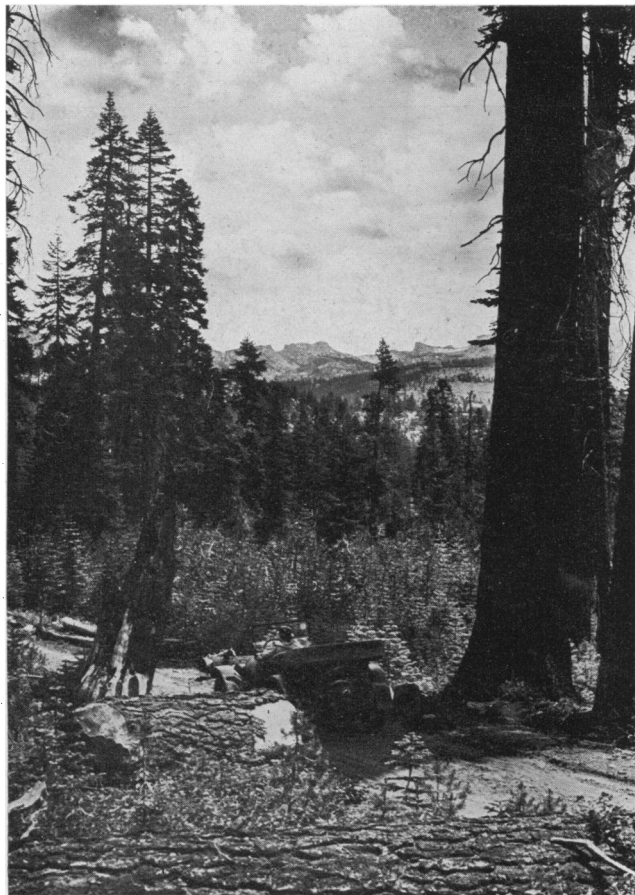


FIG. 6—The main crest of the Sierra Nevada from the Tioga Road.

Government. In July of the same year, through the co-operation of the U. S. Department of the Interior and the Department of Engineering of the State of California, this remarkable highway was opened to motor-car travel.

#### FROM SEQUOIA TO YOSEMITE CREEK

The Tioga Road, as originally built, had its initial point at Sequoia, or Crocker's Station, a familiar spot to all who have journeyed into the Yosemite by the Big Oak Flat Road. Two miles beyond Sequoia, a covered bridge spans the South Fork of the Tuolumne River. Leaving the Yosemite route at this point, the road gradually ascends for twenty



miles through a luxuriant forest of pine, spruce, and fir interspersed with groups of the imposing sequoia. The grade is a rather remarkable one, for, although it rises from the Tuolumne River at 4,350 feet to the Yosemite Creek divide at 8,550 feet, most of it can be traveled in high gear at an easy gait. The restful beauty of this highway carpeted with fragrant needles is all-absorbing to the traveler as he winds upward through the silent forest of giant trees. Under the heat of the midday sun the life of



FIG. 7.—The road leading down Leevining Canyon.

the woods is at rest, and not a sound is heard but the whir of the motor and an occasional crunch, crunch, as the wheels pass over a fallen cone.

As the road emerges above Yosemite Creek, comprehensive views of the whole upper Sierra region are obtained, framed in the drooping branches of the graceful sugar pines with their great cylindrical cones swinging at the very tips. This tree is a never-ending source of enjoyment; no two are shaped alike, and their immense arms, thrown out to form a palmlike crown, are decorated by the distinctive cones. A descent of four miles brings the road to Yosemite Creek, whose banks offer innumerable choice camping spots. Especially will the disciple of Izaak Walton be tempted to linger here.

#### LAKE TENAYA AND TUOLUMNE MEADOWS

The next nine miles to the summit of Snow Creek divide contains a few sharp pitches that reach twenty per cent for short distances, but the roadbed is hard and presents little or no difficulty. Although no expense

was spared originally to put a good surfacing on the road, years of neglect almost entirely effaced this part of the work, and it will take considerable time to make a smooth top again. Two miles below Snow Creek divide lies Lake Tenaya, a wonderful body of liquid blue set in a massive bowl of granite. Sweeping up from the surface of the lake great masses of rock stretch to the summits of the peaks thousands of feet above. The road hurries down to the shores and skirts the lake along an exceedingly well-



FIG. 8—Rugged granite peaks above Lake Tenaya.

built sea wall blasted from the solid rock. From the head of Lake Tenaya the route ascends eastward through a narrow gorge whose walls rise sheer on either side far into the blue of the sky. Many a diminutive waterfall is supplied from melting snowdrifts high up on the granite peaks, and each fall contributes its share to the rushing torrent beside the road.

Nine miles beyond Tenaya the flowery expanse of Tuolumne Meadows is suddenly spread at the traveler's feet. These meadows, encircled by the majestic peaks of Mt. Lyell, Mt. Gibbs, Mt. Dana, and Cathedral Peak, are far-famed as the most beautiful open land in the whole length of the Sierras. Through their center the Tuolumne River meanders in a leisurely fashion, as if gathering strength for its wild plunge through the Tuolumne Canyon into Hetch Hetchy Valley to the west.

#### LEEVINING CREEK

After the Meadows are traversed a gradual ascent brings the road to the summit of Tioga Pass at an elevation of 9,941 feet above sea level—the

highest road pass in the Sierras. A splendid array of rugged, wind-swept summits is presented on all sides, while on the floor of the pass a few struggling pines are fighting for their existence against the elements. After passing Tioga Lake the road follows the winding course of Leevining Creek as it threads its way through masses of curious rock formation. The huge rocks in their desolate grandeur begin to close around, when, without warning, the road plunges into the awe-inspiring depths of Lee-



FIG. 9—Lake Tenaya, set in a massive bowl of granite.

ving Canyon. A remarkable piece of engineering carries the smooth, well-graded highway hundreds of feet above the foaming creek for nine miles down the almost vertical sides of this gorge, affording views of terrifying impressiveness. The Leevining Creek road, for more than two miles cut from the solid rock, is notable throughout for the substantial manner of its construction. It was built by the State of California at a cost of \$50,000, having been begun in 1901 and finally completed in 1911.

From the mouth of Leevining Canyon the road drops rapidly down to the shores of Mono Lake, the Dead Sea of the West. At this point is encountered El Camino Sierra, the road that parallels the eastern flank of the mountains, hugging close under their massive wall from Owens Lake to Reno, Nevada. Here the Lincoln Highway is joined, and the wayfarer is once more on the beaten path.